The Effects of Policy on Cuban Transnational Families

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Abstract

This paper examines the effects of nations' policies on transnational families, specifically looking at Cuban families. Transnationalism is a relatively young theory, it was developed in the mid-1990s as an alternative to the migration theories of assimilation and integration. Scholars argued at the time that migrants were actively maintaining ties with their homeland while also establishing themselves in their respective receiving nations. The transnational practices of families are greatly impacted by the policies of both the home nation and the receiving nation, making Cuba a unique case to examine given the governments' extreme control over migration since the revolution in 1959. This paper looks at the theory of transnationalism and what role the state has played in the internal dynamics of family units as well as in the creation of transnational families altogether. The researcher specifically asks how the perception of Cuban transnational families has changed over time, primarily looking at the period of 1959 – 2000, with some reflection on modern day. This research is the result of an in-depth review of the literature, as well as a two week study tour to Cuba.

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As policy professionals we must consider the implications of the policies we design. These policies will eventually be implemented and will affect fellow citizens, in the most extreme cases this will be a matter of life or death. This is the advice and warning Dr. Philip Cooper provides to incoming Masters in Public Policy students at Portland State University. Moving this question a step forward, this paper asks what is the role of a policy professional who will develop policy that affects transnational families? This would be families with ties to a foreign nation, and therefore foreign citizens. When the unit of the family is itself divided across a border, the policies which are intended to support the US resident may in fact harm them. The lives of transnational Cuban families provide an interesting example of this policy dilemma. With 1.4 million Cubans living outside of its borders as of 2013 (UNICEF, 2014), and 1.2 million of this diaspora residing in the United States, US policymakers directly affect these transnational families on many levels.

This research will first seek to better understand the theory of transnationalism. It will then examine the case of Cuba and how policy played a role in creating transnational families historically. We ask how has the perception of Cuban transnational families changed over time? The primary focus of the research presented here is on the formative period between 1959 and 2000. While the Cuban diaspora is spread throughout the world, this paper primarily focuses on the diaspora in the US, and the US and Cuban policies affecting Cubans on the island as well as Cuban émigrés. The research will show the diversity of transnational families, as well as how these families respond to the various policies enacted by their governments. It will also show the role these policies played in acting as push and pull factors for the Cuban émigrés.

The research presented here is the result of an in-depth review of the literature in combination with a two week visit to Cuba as part of a graduate course. The two weeks in Cuba

provided the researcher with context and information on which direction to focus her research. The paper ends with some observations and general themes gathered while in Cuba.

The Roots of Transnationalism

The theory of transnationalism was developed in the mid-1990s as an alternative to the migrant theories of integration and assimilation. It was during this time that researchers in migration studies were becoming aware of the phenomenon of migrants maintaining ties to their homeland in varied aspects of their lives. They defined transnationalism,

> as the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. Immigrants who develop and maintain multiple relationships - familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political - that span borders we call 'transmigrants' (Basch, 1994, p. 7).

Prior to this definition migrants were categorized dichotomously, in which identity and the way of life became an all or nothing decision or experience (Basch, 1994). Policies of forced assimilation, such as English only instruction in schools[1], sent the message that migrants were expected to exchange the parts of their identity that were *foreign* in order to become *American*. However, the reality on the ground showed migrants' maintaining strong ties to their homeland while concurrently building ties to the host nation. These ties to the homeland are both tangible and intangible, whether through visits home or by sending funds to family, or by maintaining religious practices rooted in the culture of the homeland. Researchers found that migrants lived a

[1] For example see the 1998 California Prop 227 "English Language in the Public Schools Statute." This initiative took away foreign language instruction, requiring that all instruction be in English. The argument being that full immersion would improve children's advancement in society (Portes, 2001, p. 227)

life where national borders often blurred. Furthermore, as communication technology has increased, so has the ability for migrants to hold onto these ties and even strengthen them.

In recent years, the transnational literature has committed a lot of attention to the study of transnational parenting and the effects on the children left behind by transmigrant parents. Zentgraf and Chinchilla examined the challenging cost-benefit analysis parents go through in making their decision to migrate, often in the name of supporting those children they must leave behind (2012). This literature brings to bare important concepts and observations, such as the varying definitions of family and the gender disparity in transmigrant parenting behaviors as well as perceived responsibilities. A western definition of the nuclear family can lead to a lack of understanding of transnational families and how they function. In some cultures family is not so narrowly defined, and it is quite possible to have the role of the parent not played solely by the mother or father. Therefore, the choice to leave ones child in order to provide more financial support may not necessarily equate to leaving a child without a supportive and nurturing network (Zentgraf & Chinchilla, 2012). Additionally, research shows while both mothers and fathers may send remittances, mothers are more likely to put additional work into maintaining emotional support in addition to financial support. This disparity in behavior is reflected in children's expectations of contact "whereby mothers are expected to continue to try to maintain emotional intimacy more than father" (Zentgraf et al., 2012).

It is important that we pay attention to the policy implications of transnational parenting as well. Notably in the 2012 study from above the authors write that "public policies in sending and receiving countries shape transnational parenting practices and the costs and benefits of parent child separations in important but often invisible ways" (Zentgraf et al., 2012). For example, policies in the host country will determine the earning capacity of the transmigrant parents, for instance whether they are able to work in the formal or informal economy. Additionally, policies will determine if and how much parents are able to send to their families at

home (Zentgraf et al., 2012). The authors note that policies in the sending countries are just beginning to focus on multi-location families, by re-interpreting the role of caregivers and the support they may need. For example, changing policies that determine parental rights for caregivers of children with transnational parents (Zentgraf et al., 2012). In the receiving countries, more focus is needed on policies supporting parents before and after family reunification (Zentgraf et al., 2012). For example, providing social services such as childcare or family therapy for families during the often challenging transition of reunification.

Mette Louise Berg studies the Cuban transnational experience using ethnographic storytelling, focusing primarily on memories and the transnational connections of Cubans living in Spain. In her analysis she writes “their stories are about the importance of both homeland and host-society contexts in diaspora formation, and of the role of the state in structuring, channeling, and defining migration and its effects on the migrants themselves” (Berg, 2014, p. 264). She warns of the oversimplification of Cuban émigrés as either economic or political migrants, given the inherent relationship between the two during the Cold War. She writes “the separation of economic from political motivations for migrating was a cornerstone in Cold War politics, and remains important for diasporic Cubans, but in most cases the two are linked” (p. 264).

Scholars have used these motivations for migrating to identify categories of Cuban migrants, each of which engage in various forms of transnational practices. Migrants are categorized in terms of when they left the island nation, a shift from exiles to immigrants (Eckstein, 2014). This shift is notably due in large part to the changing political climate, from a period when migrants were seen as traitors of the revolution, exemplified by the point made in the slogan, “patria o muerte,” in which Cubans were expected to consider their commitment to the homeland a matter of life or death. This compared to a more recent view of migrants as a life line for family support. Brandhorst looks at how Cuban families manage the migration of one of its members and this effect on the family unit as a whole. Migration can be seen as a way in

which a migrant may distance themself from the responsibilities of family, or escape playing an unfavorable role within the family. Additionally, migration has been seen to greatly alter the power dynamics within the family unit (Brandhorst, 2013).

Transnational scholars have called for "an approach to the study of transnational families that takes into consideration the importance and power of the nation-state" (p. 271). Cuba presents a unique case for the study of transnationalism, in that migration has been extremely limited by the state since the revolution in 1959, leading to decades of migration that has been varied in its driving factors and in its effects on the family. The transnational experience is unavoidably intertwined with the political climate in which the transmigrant lives, both by the policies of the homeland as well as the policies in the settled country. Policy may bolster the transnational ties if the countries involved are partners, and if they are adversaries the opposite is likely the case.

Immigration and Emigration Policies from the US and Cuba, 1959 - 2000

As the Cuban revolution washed over the island nation in 1959, a wave of Cuban refugees began to flee to the United States' southern shores. Prior to the revolution, Cubans had a well founded history of seeking refuge to the north. A notable example being the national icon Jose Martí, who in the 1890s organized the new Cuban revolutionary party from the United States. However, the revolution of 1959, should be seen as a turning point in the relationship between the two countries, especially as it relates to Cuban and United States' policies of emigration and immigration, respectively. The history of migration between these two nations consists of a web of push and pull factors, through significant events, world politics, and direct public policy. While these factors play out between nation states, their impacts are felt at the individual level amongst and within families, often creating a microcosm of global and ideological disputes between kin.

The First Wave

The revolution first sparked the mass exodus of upper-class Cubans, most of whom sought asylum in the United States. Prior to the revolution, the United States played a major role in the Cuban economy. For the small upper-class of Cuban society who directly benefited from this relationship, the revolution was a direct threat to their elite status and quite possibly to their lives. In 1960, amidst this revolutionary climate in Cuba and amidst the ideological battle of the Cold War, “President Eisenhower officially recognized Cuba as a Communist state, declared Cuban immigrants to be political refugees, and established the national Cuban Refugee Program” (Blue, 2005, p. 26). Meanwhile, Cuban policy starting in 1959 until 1979, stated that Cubans were free to leave but with no possibility of return. Furthermore, all property and assets of those who left would be confiscated (Barberia, 2002).

Approximately 215,000 Cubans emigrated during the first years of the revolution between 1959-1962 (Perez, 2004). From within Cuba there were strong opinions of those who left, and the new government was very involved in shaping these opinions. Those who left were called *gusanos*, or worms. They were seen as enemies of the revolution and against what the country had fought for. Maintaining ties with family members who fled was not accepted, through both stigma and through directives from the new government (Barberia, 2002).

During the formative years of the revolution the United States policy toward Cuba could be described as subversive in nature, with the sole policy objective of overthrowing the new Cuban leadership and returning control of the country to more friendly economic and political allies of the United States. Masud-Piloto writes:

> President Eisenhower's decision to allow immigration from Cuba was not hastily made. It was carefully studied and motivated by several factors: (a) humanitarian concerns, (b) the desire to overthrow the revolution with exile forces, (c) the wish to embarrass the Cuban government, and (d) the knowledge that many of the exiles could easily be assimilated

> because they had been linked by profession, business, education, and culture to the United States. (1996, p. 33)

Thus, immigration policy was directly involved in the United States plan to regain control of the region. This was no more evident than in the training of Cuban exiles for the failed 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. Émigrés turned invaders during the Bay of Pigs did nothing to help their image amongst those Cubans remaining on the island. It was all too easy to link leaving the country with treason following the failed operation, setting a tone for decades to come.

Operation Peter Pan. Operation Peter Pan, also known as Operation Pedro Pan, is a prime example of the direct impact immigration policy had on Cuban families. The operation was carried out over 22 months between 1960 and 1962, and consisted of special visa waivers being granted to Cuban children up to 16 years of age. In the end approximately 14,000 children were airlifted from Cuba to the United States without their parents (Bravo, 2011). This operation was motivated by the rampant rumors spreading throughout the country during the early years of the revolution. Many parents were extremely fearful of the new regime and began to believe that they were at risk of losing their parental rights, that their children would be indoctrinated into communism either in the schools or even by being sent away to the Soviet Union (2011). In response to these fears, parents were offered the chance to send their children alone to the United States, in the name of "safeguarding their minds from Castro's revolutionary ideology (Mandri, 2008).

The Catholic Church played an integral role in facilitating the operation by acting as the supportive resettlement organization (Bravo, 2011). Furthermore, it is now believed that the United States Central Intelligence Agency may have played a significant role in the program as well. Some argue that the CIA was responsible for fabricating the rumors, facilitating the development of the visa waiver system, and partnering with the Catholic Church to resettle the children throughout the country (2011).

Once these children arrived in the United States they were sent to foster homes, boarding schools, orphanages, youth camps, and reformatories, essentially anywhere that would take them (2011). While many children were warmly welcomed, tragic stories of abuse have come out in which children were left in vulnerable situations with little or no protection (2011). About half the children were eventually reunited with their families, but these family reunions often took months or years ("Children Of Cuba Remember Their Flight To America," 2011). Questions remain regarding the design of the operation, since the same objective could have been met if the visa waivers were granted to families as units, rather than separating children from their families in such a traumatic fashion (Bravo, 2011).

Reflective of the political divide throughout the Cuban community, there are mixed opinions of the program. Some say that it was "an overwhelmingly positive experience" ("Children Of Cuba Remember Their Flight To America," 2011), and a chance for children to be saved from the impending dangers brought on by the new regime. Many Pedro Pan children are firmly opposed "to any normalization of relations with the Castro regime, the regime that was responsible for breaking up their families and forcing them from their homeland" ("Children Of Cuba Remember Their Flight To America," 2011). Below are examples of interviews with Pedro Pan children as well as Cubans involved in the operation, they illustrate the sentiments of both trauma and deep appreciation:

> "The family separation was the worst trauma of my life." (Bravo, 2011)
>
> "I'm so happy I was part of Operation Peter Pan. It was one of the best operations in the world. All those children we saved have shown us that our sacrifices were worth it." (Bravo, 2011).
>
> "It was a great emotional cost and it was a great cultural cost. Because I don't feel that I identify with the United States as a nation and I don't feel that I identify with the Cuban

nation as much as I would like to identify with the Cuban nation. So it was like a sword that split all those children." (Bravo, 2011)

A Push and Pull for Mass Exodus. Between 1961 and 1972 a little under half a million Cubans emigrated from the island nation (Masud-Piloto, 1996). This massive migration was catalyzed by policy decisions made by both the U.S. and Cuban governments. Official diplomatic relations between the nations ceased on January 3, 1961. Coinciding with this closing of doors was the official welcome to the United States of all Cubans "fleeing from Communist oppression" (p. 35). The US policy offered visas to all Cubans with family in the United States already. Castro's government initially complicated matters by requiring flights be paid in dollars, to which the Kennedy administration responded with an offer of free airlift out of Cuba (Masud-Piloto, 1996).

The exodus was both a blessing and a curse for the new regime in Cuba. Those who initially fled were from the upper-class, these were professionals and their departure meant the loss of valuable human capital, not to mention the financial wealth they brought with them into exile. However, those who left during this period were those most likely opposed to a socialist revolution, and thus the new government often argued that the exodus strengthened the revolution by getting rid of the opposition (Masud-Piloto, 1996). Finally, the US embargo on Cuba was issued on February 7th, 1962, further draining the island nation of resources.

The exodus drastically slowed following the Cuban Missile Crisis, with only 29,962 emigrating between November 1962 and November 1965(Masud-Piloto, 1996). However, in a speech on September 28th, 1965 Fidel Castro opened the gates and declared that any Cuban with relatives in the United States who wished to leave were free to do so. Relatives were welcomed to pick up their family members by sea vessel from the Camarioca port. In his speech, Castro blamed the US for canceling direct flights between the countries, claiming this was against the

wishes of the Cuban government. He further explained that the US would welcome the Cubans into their country and criticized their policy as hypocritical.

> The U.S.A uses emigration from Cuba as a political weapon… if before the Revolution the United States had permitted free entrance of Cuban citizens without restriction, a much larger number would have gone [than] the total of all who have left since the Revolution or who will in the future… To what other underdeveloped country in this hemisphere has the United States offered its citizens an opportunity to immigrate freely? Any other Latin American country to which it made such an offer would empty out overnight. (p. 59)

This announcement presented the United States with a challenge in managing a significant influx of refugees. A formal agreement was made in response, resulting in the passage of the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 (CCA), which retroactively provided a legal pathway to citizenship for Cubans living in the United States as of the January 1, 1959, the year of the revolution (Perez, 2004). As part of the agreement, the US government agreed to financially support the refugees, at a rate of three to four thousand per month, with priority given to those refugees with direct relatives in the United States (Masud-Piloto, 1996).

Given that the first wave of refugees came from the upper-class of society, the provision in the new policy that gave priority to émigrés with family in the U.S. already, meant that the wealthier class would continue to leave the island. In the US the flights from Cuba were dubbed "freedom flights," further branding the immigration policy as one rooted in humanitarian efforts in a battle against Communism. Entire families were now reunited outside of Cuba, leaving behind only those who chose to remain, a political decision with significant effects on the family. In the end, the Camarioca boatlift and airlift ran from December 1965 until April 1973, resulting in the exodus of over 270,000 refugees (Masud-Piloto, 1996).

Changing Perspectives of the Diaspora From *Gusano* to Community. In 1978, Castro held a press conference to announce talks with the "Cuban community abroad" (Masud-Piloto, 1996). President Carter's election had ushered in a new era of détente between the two countries, formally exemplified by both countries opening interests sections in Havana and Washington D.C. Despite the diplomatic shift, Castro was specifically inviting the diaspora to the table, not the United States government. In his announcement Castro referred to the détente as a contributing factor in the decision to hold talks. However, he made it clear that after twenty years the Revolution was well established and talks would not pose it any risk, calling the Revolution "irreversible" (p. 75). Subjects to be covered during the talks included family reunification, political prisoners, family visits to Cuba, and exit permits for those who wished to emigrate to the United States (Masud-Piloto, 1996).

This announcement marked a drastic shift in government opinion of the Cuban diaspora. After twenty years of casting the diaspora as worms and traitors to the Revolution, Castro signaled that reconciliation was important and possible. Reaction to this news was mixed, proving that the Cuban diaspora was not at all monolithic. Some violently opposed any talks with Castro, while others saw this as an encouraging gesture and opportunity. The Committee-of-75 was put together as a negotiating body, "made up of seventy-five prominent exile figures" (p. 76) from countries with large Cuban populations including the US., Venezuela, Spain and others. While Castro may have changed his rhetoric by considering the exiles as part of the Cuban community, some amongst the diaspora picked up the term traitor to describe those who decided to sit at the table with Castro.

Following the talks, a crack in the door permitted Cubans who had left twenty years before to return for visits with their family. Approximately 100,000 Cubans took this opportunity in 1979, showing that for some a trip home was enticing enough to withstand the anti-Castro pressure they would surely receive before and after their visit (Blue, 2005). Cuban Americans

were permitted to visit their families for two weeks, they were required to stay in state run hotels and use US dollars. By 1982, a total of 150,000 Cuban Americans had made the trip (Barberia, 2002).

In an attempt to control the adverse effects of visits from family abroad, the Cuban government passed Section 1 of Article 282 of the Cuban penal code. This section “prohibited the exporting of foreign currency, obtaining foreign currency balances in excess of needs, the selling, transferring or buying of foreign currencies, travelers checks, money orders or other instruments denominated in foreign currencies” (p. 8). This would be one of the first examples of Cuban policy focused on the control of remittances into the country and the possible influences those monies could have on the fabric of the socialist revolution. It is worth pointing out that it was considered a criminal act to hold “balances in excess of needs,” an example of a socialist concept in which the definition of needs was left to the state.

The Second Wave

The reconnection of transnational families in the late 70s was later seen as a catalyst which spurred a series of events leading to the Mariel Boatlift in 1980, in which approximately 120,000 Cubans fled the island from the port at Mariel (Blue, 2005). Any progress that was made by the Committee-of-75 came to a sudden halt. Mariel meant another loss of human capital for Castro and yet another refugee crisis for the US.

On the first of April 1980, the Peruvian embassy was stormed by six asylum seekers. In response Castro announced that anyone who wanted to leave could and should by going to the Peruvian embassy as well. This announcement from Castro was reminiscent of reactions to civil unrest during the era of the Camarioca airlift. And just as in the past, a surprising number of Cubans flooded the embassy, numbering close to 10,000. With this event came Castro’s shift back to labeling those who sought to leave as “scum, criminals, lumpen, parasites, and antisocial elements” (Masud-Piloto, 1996, p. 79). On April 20th, Castro yet again called for any relatives in

the United States to come pick up their kin, now from the Mariel harbor. Carter's response, maintaining the tone of his predecessors, welcomed the Cubans fleeing the island. Declaring that the United States would "provide an open heart and open arms for the tens of thousands of refugees seeking freedom from Communist domination" (p. 83). This announcement commenced the Mariel boatlift, with little or no formal policy laid out. By May, daily arrivals in Florida averaged 3,000 (Masud-Piloto, 1996).

The Mariel boatlift put the US immigration policy under a spotlight. Not only had the Carter administration not formally set out a policy or procedures to administer the arrival of an average of 3,000 Cubans per day, but for months prior to the boatlift Haitians had been flooding the Florida shores and had been denied a safe haven. Calling the Cuban exiles refugees from Communism had been the party line for two decades, however the Carter administration began to question whether those leaving from the Mariel harbor were more economic migrants than political exiles (Masud-Piloto, 1996). Carter risked being called out for his contradictory immigration policy, and for placing quite the burden on the state of Florida in the process. The Cuban-Haitian entrant classification became the seemingly temporary solution to this dilemma. The new classification granted both the Cuban and Haitian exiles legal status in the country and financial support for resettlement (Masud-Piloto, 1996).

A Shift in the Who and the Why. Camarioca and Mariel bare some similarities, for example in both cases the U.S. sent welcoming messages to all refugees fleeing from Communism in Cuba, and Castro spurred both events on by announcing a virtual opening of the gates. However, given the period of time in between each event, much had occurred which led to a major difference in who chose to go north. Initially, those in exodus fled the revolutionary shift from capitalism to communism. Those in the Mariel boatlift on the other hand had come of age during the revolution and had lived many years under communism. Sarah Blue notes that "Marielito immigrants and their families in Cuba, though facing the same divisive pressures as

earlier immigrants, had an underlying understanding of the political and economic reality of revolutionary Cuban society and deep social and psychological roots in that society in spite of any ideological differences with it" (Blue, 2005, p. 27). In addition, early exiles were likely to have left either as a family unit or in stages but eventually reunited with their family abroad. For these early exiles, family ties to the island were often severed due to differing political ideologies and views of the revolution. Furthermore, for the family left behind, maintaining contact with family abroad was greatly stigmatized, and in some ways could be dangerous. In a much different situation, Blue notes that a majority of those who left during the Mariel boatlift were men who had left their families behind not because of political differences but instead to pursue economic opportunity, and thus they were more likely to maintain transnational ties once they departed from Cuba (Blue, 2005).

Blue describes the 80s as a period of "tentative transnationalism," (Blue, 2005, p. 27) due in large part to the connections made during the late 70s between families and the mass exodus of the Mariel boatlif. While the policies during this decade on both sides restricted connection between these transnational families, the interest and desire to connect were there. These connections would soon become a source of much needed support in the decade to come, with the fall of the Soviet Union and the severe economic crisis Cuba found itself in as a result.

The Special Period and the Balseros. The fall of the Soviet Union left Cuba in an extremely vulnerable state. Since the USSR was Cuba's primary trading partner for decades, the collapse resulted in a dramatic crash of the Cuban economy and a loss of 35% of the GDP in 3 years between 1990 and 1993 (Rodríguez, 2017). The Cuban government labeled the early 90s as "The Special Period in Peacetime," a euphemism for a period characterized by severe shortages, especially in food and petroleum. During the crisis, Cubans reverted back to old methods of transportation and farming, such as using oxen and horse and buggies. This also marked the beginning of urban farming, a solution to the extremely limited and insufficient rations provided

to Cubans during the crisis. In many ways, this period was a perfect example of the Cuban society *resolviendo,* which translated means "resolving." This is a characteristic deeply rooted in Cuban society, that when faced with an obstacle one will simply *resuelve*, or find an alternative solution.

For many this alternative solution was to leave the island, or to send word to family abroad that their support was greatly needed. Thus, this era was further characterized by two related phenomena, first a flood of millions of dollars coming into the country under the table from émigrés, creating a black market in the city of Havana (Coyula, 2017). And second, the third mass exodus from the island since the revolution, this time in massive numbers of makeshift boats constructed from tires as well as the building materials from people's homes (Bosch & Domènech, 2002). Those fleeing earned the name *balseros*, or rafters.

Reaction to the balseros was mixed, similar to past mass migrations. In a documentary covering this period, images show scenes of protests in the streets where crowds chanted "traitor" and "leave" (2002). These scenes are followed by scenes of massive crowds of people cheering in a procession following newly crafted rafts through the streets of Havana on their way to the Malecón; once at the water's edge, families wade into the sea crying and singing songs, blessing those embarking on the life threatening journey north.

For many, taking to the sea was the only option, and an extremely risky one. As one *balsero* reflected "I didn't have and do not have any problems with the Castro regime or the Revolution. I fought for the Revolution…Cuba was very, very poor… My choices were to leave with my children or starve" (Eckstein & Barberia, 2002, p. 807).

The Special Period required policy responses by both the US and the Cuban governments. First, in reaction to the flood of dollars coming into the country, the Cuban government decided to legalize US dollars by creating a second currency specifically for foreigners. This policy opened the door for even more remittances, which soon became an

important source of income for many Cuban families, and as an unintended consequence a source of disparity as well (Coyula, 2017). In addition to legalizing the dollar, the Cuban government permitted the opening of foreign currency only stores. Certain commodities were only available at these stores, and thus only those Cubans with access to remittances could benefit. Thus, families on the same block may be in vastly different situations economically, depending on their connections abroad. Furthermore, to complicate matters Cubans were actually not permitted to use the foreign currency themselves. The currency was legalized but only for foreigners to use, which included visiting Cuban émigrés. Thus, Cuban émigrés visiting would be put into a role of authority within the family by being singled out as the provider. In some cases, these remittances would create conflict around the concept of consumer goods and the ideals of the revolution, and a lack of understanding between family members (Barberia, 2002).

The second problem that faced both nations was yet another exodus of refugees. While remittances flooded into Cuba, significant numbers of Cubans took to the seas in makeshift rafts, leading many to think the early 90s would be a repeat of the Mariel boatlift from just a decade before. It was during this time that Cuba found itself dealing with mass protests, unrest, asylum seekers flooding various embassies in Havana, and a series of violent hijackings of tugboats and ferries attempting to escape to the north (Masud-Piloto, 1996; Sartori, 2001). Between 1990 and 1994, some 13,600 Cubans left the island and arrived in the United States (Duany, 2017). The Cuban government made attempts to prevent this exodus, by interdicting the vessels and detaining the would be émigrés to the island.

By 1994, the exodus had gotten out of control and amidst this crisis Castro and Clinton volleyed countering policies back and forth across the Florida strait. On August 5th, Castro announced he would no longer stop anyone wishing to leave the island, a message reminiscent of earlier episodes of mass exodus. Castro once again was angered by US immigration policy, blaming it for incentivizing Cubans to take to the dangerous waters. The month of August

became known as the Balsero crisis, with 30,900 Cubans on rafts interdicted at sea starting August 13th (Duany, 2017). By August 19th, President Clinton fired back at Castro and declared that Castro would not be permitted to dictate US immigration policy again as he had in the past. Clinton announced:

> In recent weeks, the Castro regime has encouraged Cubans to take to the sea in unsafe vessels to escape their nation's internal problems… let me be clear: The Cuban Government will not succeed in any attempt to dictate the American immigration policy…
>
> Today I have ordered that illegal refugees from Cuba will not be allowed to enter the United States. Refugees rescued at sea will be taken to our navel base at Guantánamo while we explore the possibility of other safe havens within the region…The United States will detain, investigate and, if necessary, prosecute Americans who take to the sea to pick up Cubans. Vessels used in such activities will be seized. (Sartori, 2001, pp. 328–329)

Along with Clinton's policy to stop the rafters on their way to US shores and bring them to Guantánamo, the president reduced the amount of remittances Cuban Americans could send to their families, as well as a number of other policies strengthening the embargo. And between 1996 and 1998, the US completely prohibited the sending of remittances all together (Blue, 2005). By 1995, the two governments came to an agreement, establishing what would be called the "wet foot, dry foot" policy. Under this new regime, "unless citing fears of persecution, Cubans intercepted at sea would be returned to Cuba, where the government agreed not to retaliate against them" (Batalova & Zong, 2017). For all those who did claim persecution, the US government would provide resettlement support and a pathway to citizenship. And finally there would be an annual minimum of 20,000 Cubans allowed into the United States (Sartori, 2001).

Amidst the policy battle between Castro and Clinton, the 1990s became the decade of family reconnection, not only in terms of remittances but also in the shear number of Cuban Americans returning to the island to visit family. In 1993, less than 10,000 Cuban Americans visited, by 1996 it was 60,000 and then by 2001 it was over 100,000 (Eckstein & Barberia, 2002). Blue writes that the Special Period was one in which migration was depoliticized, and both outmigration and remittances were seen "as a practical solution to household scarcity" (Blue, 2005, p. 29). For many Cuban Americans this was an opportunity to reconnect with family. Studies found that, despite their previous political divides, older generations of émigrés reached out to family on the island to provide support (Blue, 2005). Surprisingly émigrés who had left before 1980 were more likely to visit than those who left after 1980 (Eckstein & Barberia, 2002). However, this difference may have been due to the difference in socioeconomic status between those who had arrived more recently and those who had been established in the US for decades.

Difference between the First and Second Wave. Susan Eckstein and Lorena Barberia (2002) find in their study of Cuban émigrés that there was a distinct difference between those who emigrated before 1980 and those who emigrated after. They label these two cohorts as first wavers and second wavers, and they found that each cohort differed in socioeconomic status as well as in the "opportunity structure they faced when arriving in the States" (p. 801). Those in the first wave were received by more welcoming policy in the US, while those who left after 1980 experienced more resistance. In both cases the US policy did act as a pull factor, in that those who chose to emigrate understood there would be certain benefits waiting for them. In some cases, this understanding was not from the US policy alone, but also from friends and family who had already settled in the United States.

Another major difference between the groups was the push factors. The first wavers were generally pushed from the island due to political shifts, while a majority of the second wavers

were pushed in large part by the dire economic situation on the island (Eckstein & Barberia, 2002). For those in the second wave, exogenous events such as the fall of the Soviet Union, in conjunction with the continued US blockade meant a choice of staying to starve or fleeing to survive. However, a similar life or death decision faced those who left in the first wave during the Revolution, given that any connection with the fallen Batista government likely meant a prison sentence or execution.

Discussion: Modern Day Challenges

While visiting Cuba for two weeks, several themes repeated themselves related to migration and its effects on Cuba. What follows is a short discussion of those themes which are: the role remittances play in the Cuban economy today and their effects; the concept of circular migration; and the current shift in US/Cuban relations.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the onset of the Special Period, remittances have increased substantially. According to a presentation by Dr. José Luis Rodríguez García, the former Minister of Economy and Planning of Cuba, starting in 1989, remittances were calculated at 537 million USD, by 2010 they were 1,180 billion USD and by 2016 they were 2.5 to 3 billion USD (2017). Additionally, remittances from 2016 were split 50/50 between consumption and investment (Rodríguez, 2017). Thus, remittances have continued to play a significant role in Cuban families' economic well being. Dr. Rodriguez explained during his presentation how the Cuban government historically has attempted to capitalize on the flow of remittances by essentially adding a tax on those items that are only available for purchase using foreign currency. According to Enrique Cabezas, PhD, these remittances benefit the country as a whole and there is no way of avoiding the flow (Cabezas, 2017). However, Dr. Rodriguez said that it is important for the government to figure out a good way to use the money (Rodríguez, 2017).

While taking a tour of Havana, one will see the striking juxtaposition of crumbling homes next-door to beautiful and newly renovated homes. Miguel Coyula, a prominent architect from

Havana calls this phenomena ruins to remittances (Coyula, 2017). According to Mr. Coyula, Havana is the largest recipient of remittances as well as a major benefactor of the tourism industry, with 51% of the income coming from tourism (Coyula, 2017). With this in mind, 96% of the stock of homes in Havana are privately owned, however with an average monthly salary of $27, routine upkeep of aging homes is nearly impossible. As a result, much of the remittances coming in go towards renovation of homes. Those lucky enough to have connections abroad are able to benefit from the burgeoning tourism sector, renting out rooms in their renovated homes to tourists looking for a more authentic experience. Coinciding with this stream of funding from remittances is the slow change towards self-employment, a major shift in the Cuban economy and society as a whole. Self-employment and increased opportunities to profit from the tourism industry could result in severe income inequality.

The Cuban government today faces a challenging transition, away from a command and control based economy and toward one focused more on competition and capitalist principles. This transition is challenging because many of the socialist ideals are still deeply rooted in what it means to be Cuban, and because many of the socialist policies that remain in place clash with policies based on opening up the economy. For example, remittances and tourism have the potential to lead to increases in income inequality, which contradicts the socialist principles the Revolution was built on. Additionally, due to a temporary housing policy from the Revolution, these socialist policies may eventually lead to urban sprawl and the gentrification of Havana. As part of the Revolution, the Castro regime outlawed homelessness, declaring that all people must have a house even if temporarily. This policy led to the construction of temporary housing. Today, temporary housing is constructed on the outskirts of Havana with little planning. The construction is meant to be temporary and thus those who live in these new neighborhoods experience limited access to utilities. With the influx of remittances going towards renovations, those families who do not have access to foreign funds find themselves in temporary housing in

the outskirts when their homes crumble (Coyula, 2017). Providing a home for those who have lost theirs is in many ways a laudable government policy. However, it is a serious problem when there are 17,000 people currently living in temporary housing, and 140,000 people on the waitlist (Coyula, 2017). According to Mr. Coyula, an average of 3 buildings collapse per day in Havana, making this a real concern, not just a hypothetical one.

The process of circular migration is a theme which was repeated in three different contexts while visiting Cuba. Circular migration is when émigrés return to their home country, deciding not to permanently settle abroad. The three different individuals who mentioned this theme were: an expatriate living in the country for five years, a nephew speaking of his uncle who had spent three decades in Germany, and an employee in a state run business. Collectively these three spoke of the challenges faced by Cuban émigrés abroad, in a rapidly moving globalized society based on capitalism. Some mentioned the idea that Cubans were simply not prepared by their upbringing to compete, and that life abroad was more difficult because of this deeply ingrained characteristic; a trait which was informed and enforced throughout their life in a socialist society. In one case, even after years abroad, the idea of returning home was by far more attractive than staying in a developed nation. The émigré returned to [his] more simple life on the island, with [his] families. In a contrasting case the émigré expressed sheer lack of understanding why a sibling would leave her nice home and good job in Havana for a stressful job abroad. In this case there was almost no hope for a return, back to the family and to what this individual believed was a great life in Havana.

This theme, of an unrealistic perception of life abroad was also heard from Cuban clients at an office of refugee resettlement in the United States where the researcher worked in past years. Balancing family ties with challenges faced by an aggressive capitalist culture plagued those who had worked hard to make the journey north. While these stories represent a small fraction of the overall Cuban experience abroad, the theme's repetition is worth noting.

A final note on the recent shift in relations between the US and Cuban governments. The Cuban people responded with joy to President Obama's announcement of a warming relationship between the two countries. The research heard stories of lines around the block coming out of the US embassy, plans to take opportunities abroad to visit, and more. Since the election of Donald Trump there has been a notable chilling affect, with a shift back to a more familiar situation characterized by uncertainty and distrust.

Since the Trump Administration greatly reduced the number of staff at the embassy, there is no longer a line out the door waiting to apply for a visa. Instead, if a Cuban wishes to apply for a visa they can spend approximately $400 dollars, fly to a city in Latin America with a US embassy and apply for one. However, as was explained by one Cuban, why would you spend all that money without the guarantee of getting the Visa? You could end up having your application rejected and be out the cost of the flight, a hard cost to bear. One individual remarked that there was no outcry in response to the shift back to restricted policies, instead there was a sense of familiarity and acceptance that one must simply continue to wait. For many years, the Cuban people have shown that they are very capable of *resolviendo* any barriers both artificial and real, put up between the US and Cuba. And sometimes *resolver* means to wait, or to go through another country, or to buy an internet card off the street and call your family from the local hotspot in the town square.

Conclusion

The research presented here focused on the following questions: what role did policies play in creating transnational families? How has the perception of these families change over time? And what role do policy professionals play in developing policy that will affect transnational families. By taking the historical perspective, the research showed that both the US and Cuban policies acted as push and pull factors in fueling the Cuban migration. These policies furthermore had the often negative effect of creating fissions within and amongst families along

political ideologies. For those families not separated by political differences, the move north was often dangerous, and was not so much a choice as a necessity to survive. Policy has played a large role in making emigration a necessity. Policy has also played a large role in framing the perception of those who do decide to emigrate. Both governments painted their own image of the émigrés, either as refugees on freedom flights or as worms, parasites, and threats to the Revolution.

Finally, it is important as policymakers that we consider the global effects of our policies. In the matters discussed above, the US clearly used its immigration policy at times as a tool in waging a geopolitical battle. Castro also frequently used Cuban emigration policies to strengthen his Revolution and to shame his adversary. I would argue that the relationship between these two countries is extremely complicated and neither side is ever completely innocent nor is either completely to blame. I would, however, argue that the policies and the methods in which these policies were used had the direct effect of creating transnational families and thus putting hardship on both nations' citizens.

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